



Coping strategies for frontline professionals

Small steps to building greater resilience in challenging times



Working in a “helping profession,” such as medicine, emergency response, social work, hospice, law enforcement, education and others, offers great rewards but can also take a toll. This can produce compounding challenges during times of uncertainty and change. With competing pressure from work and other obligations it may seem like you have no time to prioritize self-care. Challenging times like these are when it is especially important to focus on taking good care of yourself physically, mentally and emotionally. Remember, small steps can create big rewards. Below are some coping actions that can help you reflect on self-care opportunities even on the busiest of days.

Physical coping strategies

- + **Get adequate rest.** Rest is the foundation of stress management. Establish a regular bedtime routine to ensure you get enough rest. Sleep helps your body renew its resources for the next challenge.
- + **Exercise.** Exercising is an effective way to reduce stress. If allowed in your area, go out for a walk or run. Find videos online that are fun and stress-relieving. Consult your health care provider before beginning a new exercise routine.
- + **Eat well-balanced and regular meals.** You may need to experiment with new ingredients or recipes, or you may even be cooking for the first time. Get creative!
- + **Choose activities that allow you to relax** (read, quilt, paint, do puzzles, play board/video games – whatever you like to do).
- + **Avoid alcohol and drugs** as a means to cope, unless your provider gives you a needed prescription.

Mental Coping Strategies

- + **Write out your challenges, taking a problem-solving approach.** For example, if you are having difficulty finding childcare, write out the hours you need help, people you know who might be able to assist. Create a manageable to-do list.
- + **Take time to form an emergency plan** in the event that you or a family member falls ill. Know that you may never have to activate it.
- + **Talk it out.** Brainstorm your problem-solving ideas with your loved ones to get their input and ideas.
- + **Shift your focus** to the here-and-now needs of your loved ones, activities you enjoy and the things you need to get done. Give yourself a mental break from everything that might scare you.
- + **Structure your time.** Large segments of unstructured time will tempt your thoughts to center endlessly around what troubles you most, and in doing this, your interpretation of what's happening will become more alarming and less objective.

+ Take note of what remains constant.
With so many changes, what remains the same? Hold on to routines, and use them to maintain some stability. Regular meal and bedtimes are just two examples of ways we can make our world feel more predictable.

+ Remind yourself of your abilities and strengths. Self-statements such as “I have always figured out some way to land on my feet” get you back in touch with the fact that you’re steering your own ship – you’re not a bottle tossing and turning on life’s seas.

+ Set short-term goals. Take it day by day. What are some things that you want to accomplish in the next hour, the next day, the next week? Start small and build from there.

+ Plan something to look forward to. It may be as simple as thinking back to activities you enjoy that you haven’t had an opportunity to do. Can you find a creative way to adapt your plan to work them back into your daily life?

Emotional Coping Strategies

+ Reach out to people who care. Identify and talk out your thoughts, feelings and fears with loved ones. In isolation, you may need to be creative – phone calls, video chat and text messaging may be options. Use technology to your advantage.

+ Recognize “we are all in this together.” This is truly a global, shared experience. The fears, anxieties and challenges you are experiencing on the frontlines and in health care settings are shared across the world in different capacities. Recognize that you are not alone in coping with this significant challenge.

+ Offer support/assistance to others. Reaching out and supporting others helps change your emotional focus. You can see your problems in a bigger context and feel part of the solution rather than just a victim of circumstance.

+ Write out your feelings. You may feel very stressed or exhausted. You may be feeling some loss of normalcy or a dislike for what this new sense of normal has become. If things feel out of balance, remember this is temporary and take time to understand how you are feeling in this moment; journaling can help.

+ We are here to help.

Consult a medical doctor or mental health provider if you need additional support. There are also many available resilience-building resources at CignaResilience.com.